Grammar and ‘others’

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My purpose in this paper is to argue for the linguistic appropriation of the individual speaker’s awareness of ‘others’ in his knowledge of language. When appropriated, this awareness, I am proposing, is located in a component being called the C(onsensual) Component that is crucially involved in the organisation of social aspects of linguistic knowledge in relation to internalised aspects.

The paper is organised as follows. Sections 1 and 2 discuss the origin of the term ‘grammar’ and its efficacy for the cognitivist view of language. Section 3 shows how, contrary to their assumption, analyses in Transformational Generative Linguistics (TGL) fail to adhere to the criteria of grammar. Sections 4 and 5 present external and internal evidence for a function of ‘others’ in the speaker’s internalised knowledge of language. Section 6 discusses the ideological implications of the ‘other’ concept in linguistic knowledge.

1. ‘GRAMMAR’ AND ‘LANGUAGE’

TGL now maintains that what is loosely called knowledge of language involves the knowledge of ‘grammar’ and its interaction with other cognitive systems.

I wish to thank Prabul Dasgupta and P.G. Patel for their useful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.
A grammar, also called ‘I-language’ (‘I’ for ‘internalised’), is the tacit knowledge of language internalised by the mind/brain (Chomsky 1986). It is an instance of an innate endowment called Universal Grammar. Knowing a grammar must be distinguished from knowing how to put it to use — ‘E-language’ (‘E’ for ‘externalised’), which is independent of the mind/brain. Similarly, knowing a grammar must be distinguished from knowing a language such as Arabic or Pashto. In fact, the notion ‘language’ is an ‘epiphenomenon’ and entirely dispensable. In Dasgupta’s (1996) account, the development in TGL leading to the disuse of the notion ‘language’ is a reversal to the Cartesian programme for the study of language.

The Cartesian influence notwithstanding, the story of the importance of the notion ‘grammar’ in TGL is worth recounting for the purpose at hand. Its origin lies in the official cognitivist doctrine to which generative linguistics adheres, namely, that the workings of one mind are not accessible to other observers (Lewis 1941). The only criterion for the existence of ‘other minds’ is the ‘creative aspect of language use’ which is ‘a mystery that eludes our intellectual grasp’ (Chomsky 1980: 222). The cognitive abilities of an individual or, in TGL terminology, grammar, on the other hand, presents problems that can be addressed for explanation.

Considering the complex network of internal systems that operate in a variety of conditions and determine the linguistic behaviour of individuals, the only method that could make a serious study of our knowledge of language possible is a series of abstractions and idealisations. The first step in this direction was the decision for TGL to be ‘concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by’ memory limitations, distractions, etc. (Chomsky 1965: 3). The next step was to confine the theory to the study of grammar, in the sense explained earlier.

The choice of ‘grammar’ as the object of study also follows from the effort in TGL to grapple with two types of problems that were inherent in structural linguistics. One had to do with the speech community as the locus of language. The notion of speech community is not completely verifiable, and so linguistic statements based on it are not falsifiable and completely verifiable, the main criteria of scientific statements, within the Deductive Nomological model of explanation. If the locus of language is assigned to the individual speaker-listener, then linguistic statements based on the data drawn from his linguistic behaviour can be validated in natural or experimental conditions.

Secondly, the data drawn from a speech community cannot be brought under the control of the theory. There is the difficulty in separating variant from invariant phenomena. The linguist can never be sure about the variation
resulting from a principle of grammar. This goes against the grain of autonomous linguistics, whose main inspiring question has been how language is possible amidst data in so much confusion, flux and imperfection (for example, Braine 1971). As Jakobson has pointed out, 'It is only by consistently taking the invariants into our account that we will be able to free ourselves from blind empiricism' (Jakobson and Pomorska 1983: 50). The concept of a grammar successfully frees a linguistic description from 'blind empiricism' in that its rules function not merely to give a psychologically real account of linguistic phenomena, observed in an individual's productions, but also to predict that despite observed variation, there is a common core around which the variations nucleate.

2. COGNITIVIST AND COMMUNICATIONIST CONCEPTIONS OF LINGUISTIC KNOWLEDGE

The distinction between 'grammar' and 'language' significantly brings to focus several such conceptual distinctions about the linguistic reality, such as language as 'a medium of cognition' or as 'a means of communication', as private or public knowledge, and so on. The opposing points of view, which nonetheless share the explanation of the human individual's knowledge of language as their theoretical goal, can be presented in the form of statements in (1) and (2), the former usually ascribed to TGL.

(1) i. Language is a means of cognition.
   ii. The knowledge of language is a form of mental representation.
   iii. Language is a natural object; the ability to know a language is innate.
   iv. The knowledge of language is private, and interacts with other aspects of cognition such as belief, knowledge about the external world, etc.
   v. Linguistic issues relating to problems such as language change, language variation, and translation relate to the use of language, and are not central to the theory of linguistic knowledge.
   vi. The main goal of a theory of language is to explain invariant properties of linguistic structure.
   vii. The 'scientific methodology' for linguistics is the same as that for natural sciences.

(2) i. Language is a medium of communication (Strawson, Halliday).
   ii. The knowledge of language is a mental activity (Dummett, McDonough).
Language is a social object; the ability to know a language is acquired along with other social aspects of behaviour (Bernstein, Quine, Labov).

The knowledge of language is public (Wittgenstein, Kripke).

Linguistic issues relating to problems such as language change, language variation, and translation relate to indeterminate aspects of linguistic form and meaning and are of intrinsic interest to a theory of language (Labov, Moore and Carling).

The goal of a theory of language is to explain both invariant and variant properties of linguistic structure (for example, the Prague School, Weinreich et al.).

The ‘scientific methodology’ for linguistic research is the same as that for social sciences (for example, Quine, Hymes).

It is easy to see that the concept of ‘grammar’, assumed to be a natural kind (that is, innate), consisting of linguistic rules and representations internalised by the human child under the impetus of social exposure, and amenable to scientific investigations properly fits the cognitive view of language characterised in (1), but not the functionalist view characterised in (2). The approaches exemplifying opposite persuasions are sometimes assumed to be complementary, for example, in the view that language is both a ‘means of cognition’ and a ‘medium of communication’ (Kelkar 1992), or both a ‘natural’ and ‘social’ kind (Pateman 1987), or investigatable using the methodology of both natural and social sciences (Quine 1972).

1GTL keeps the two approaches separate on the modular view that the linguistic faculty is a distinct cognitive faculty with its specific properties of principles and mental representations, as compared to the unitary view according to which individuals have uniform capacities for all cognitive faculties. The notion ‘language’ is found to be a misfit for the modular view of the linguistic faculty on account of its socio-cultural connotations.

The move in TGL to focus on the notion ‘grammar’ shows that it has come closer to philosophy and to psychology, in both of which the notion ‘idiocent’ is found to be sufficient. This move is particularly suited to its empirical research programme. It is more restrictive and focused, to begin with, than the empiricist unitary approach and, if found to be unsuccessful in the face of complex data, its schematism can be expanded. Its failure or success will still be judged by the criteria of science, as compared to the research into the concept ‘language’, a non-empirical concept.
3. LINGUISTIC ANALYSES

Since the distinction between ‘grammar’ and ‘language’ is crucial in TG linguistic theory, it is pertinent to enquire whether the criteria of ‘grammar’ are adhered to in the works of TG linguists. There are at least three aspects of TG linguistic analysis which do not conform to the criteria of ‘grammar’.

First, the data are always representative, and never idiosyncratic. What is irreducible to a commonly observed fact of the language and is the individual’s own, is of no theoretical significance and interest (Lyons 1991).

Secondly, TG linguists continue to depend for evidence for the physical reality of grammars primarily on intuitive judgements. The latter are needed to establish the ‘truth’ of grammars, but not their physical reality, for which external evidence from domains such as language acquisition, language disorders, historical change, and language contact is needed. Research in the latter areas is carried out without any support from claims regarding the accountability of TG theory to explanations of their problems.

Thirdly, TG usually finds it necessary to make two kinds of generalisations—universal ones and language-specific ones. For instance, Malayalam has two syllable structure constraints, among others—one, known as the No-Coda Constraint, is a language-specific constraint, not found, for example, in Sanskrit; and the other, known as the Sonority Sequencing Principle, is a universal constraint, common to most languages. It might be argued that language-specific constraints should be regarded as grammar-specific constraints. This description however stretches the notion of grammar to the extent that it obliterates the distinction between what the speaker has inherited as part of his innate endowment and what he has inherited on account of growing up belonging to a specific language community. If everything is a part of grammar then the distinction between universal principles and anything like language-specific principles is rendered trivial.

4. EXTERNAL EVIDENCE FOR ‘OTHERS’

The source of the misdirection in TG in meeting the criteria of grammar in linguistic analyses is a certain element in the individual’s knowledge of language, namely, other-concept—the idea that individuals cognise the presence of other linguistic facts apart from those that are amenable to generalisation.

The other-concept is a home area in the notion ‘language’, especially the creative aspects of language use as envisaged in Pragmatics, and in
normative approaches to meaning. (for example, Kripke 1982: 22, 24, 30–31n). Meaning in these approaches is determined not by a person’s internal dispositions or mechanisms, but the linguistic institutions of a culture that have in them embodied the ‘functions’ which determine the use of language.

The presence of such linguistic institutions is rationalised by the ‘other’ concept. It is necessary, I am proposing, as an interface area between the internalised grammar and language. Consider, for example, questions commonly asked by speakers in admittance of their lack of knowledge of forms existing as an external reality, for example, “What does the phrase mean?” “How is the word pronounced?” When a speaker’s, typically a child’s, wiring connecting a linguistic form to its mental representation is missing or broken, and both possibilities must be envisaged in any natural system, he automatically turns to others—people who ‘know’ it. This happens because there is in-built harmony between what the child knows and what others in whose ambience he uses it know. ‘Others’ help an individual plug the hole in his mental representation of linguistic forms.

The automatic turning to others for help regarding ‘wiring’ problems is not a part of one’s culture, acquired through experience, arbitrarily varying with different language communities, but rather a natural reflex common to all learners, regardless of their languages and individual talents. Promulgation of a particular form representing a certain language variety is a matter of culture, but not the individual’s disinterested instinct cognising ‘others’ sharing his knowledge. At least not at the present stage of human evolution, whatever might have been the case in the early stages.

The presence of others in the grammar is vindicated especially in those cases where there is no logical basis to knowing an aspect of language, for example, how the compound *dancing doll* means ‘a doll that dances’, but the compound *dancing master* does not only mean ‘a master who dances’ but also or rather ‘one who teaches dancing’. No method of induction can help the learner form generalisations about such aspects of grammar. The child, of course, learns them as individual items and incorporates them as part of her grammar via the transduct of ‘others’. Non-inductively generalisable data, that is, data that make up broken families of generalisations, for example, word-formation rules, are organised by the innate cognitive devices operating within the mental space connected with ‘others’.

On a conventional interpretation of facts such as nominal compounds and word-formation rules it is easy to see that UG without the notion of ‘others’ would certainly account for creativity but not for what makes grammar non-esoteric and sensitive to alterity. That there is some meaning in using the term ‘Universal Grammar’ in the revised sense to include the ontological presence
of 'others' is not so difficult to concede if we bear in mind that the root 'know', in relation to language, means both 'understand sentences produced by others' and 'produce sentences that can be understood by others'. The awareness of others is assumed, and is thus a primitive notion, in relation to knowledge of language.

The word 'awareness' is crucial here. It should be understood in the sense of the Indian Navya-Nyaya system of logic (Matilal 1985), where it includes both propositional acts such as believing, judging, perceiving, intuiting etc., and non-propositional acts such as sensing – for example, our knowledge of sandalwood, whose identity rests both with the smell and the material wood.

It is important to bear in mind that the relation between 'grammar' and 'others' is not one of causality in the sense that A causes B, notwithstanding the historical fact that a speaker appropriates his grammar from others. If it were not so, we could explain the grammar of A in terms of the grammar of B. But the fact is that we don't. 'Other' here should be understood in the idealised sense to mean 'other speakers' as well as written and spoken productions by other speakers. It should be understood as a general term of the sortal type (for example, dog, river, etc.), not as a singular term (for example, Bill Clinton, that stool, M.G. Road, etc.), nor as a general term of the mass type (for example, sugar, crowd, etc.). We assume that Universal Grammar has cognitive space for 'others' understood in the sortal sense but subject to interpretation as a general or singular term by the individual speaker.

5. INTERNAL EVIDENCE

The preceding section discussed externalist arguments for the linguistic appropriation of 'others' in the grammar, based on the assumption that an individual speaker depends on the outside environment for the full creativity of his knowledge of language. Let us now turn to internal evidence for a general phenomenon of indeterminacy in grammars, such as optional rule application and exceptions to rules and constraints.

Optional application of rules causes difficulty in language learning (Baker 1979; Dell 1981). A grammar \( G \) with optional rules is less learnable than grammar \( G' \) without optional rules; yet \( G \), not \( G' \), characterises natural language. This is a paradox that has no clear solution in the learnability theory. The difficulty that optional rule applications create for the learnability of grammars consists in giving rise to over-inclusive grammars, that is, grammars containing both correct and incorrect forms. Thus, a rule \( R \) that changes a set of forms \( X \) to a set of forms \( Y \) optionally, gives rise to two sets of forms.
In actuality, however, not all the members of the set that form a natural class may have both forms. In that case our grammar will be over-inclusive, as it may give rise to a nonexistent form.

T&4 proposes alternative ways to prevent grammars from being over-inclusive. One of the common devices is marking a given lexical or phonological form for its exceptional feature in the lexicon, that module of the grammar that includes, among other things, idiosyncratic information about words. For example, the ungrammaticality of (4b) is accounted for by marking the ditransitive verb 'suggest' in the lexical entry as disallowing the frame \[ \_NP(Indirect\ Object) + NP(Direct\ Object) \], so that a sentence with the verb 'suggest' does not undergo the optional Dative Movement.

(3) a. Mary gave a shock to her boss.
b. Mary gave her boss a shock.

(4) a. John suggested the idea to his boss.
b. *John suggested his boss the idea.

The possibility of over-inclusiveness of phonological forms is much greater, especially on account of lexical (roughly, phonemic) rule applications (Pandey 1991). At any rate, resort to the lexical entry is a common solution to the problem of over-inclusiveness.

The question of exceptions and irregularities is different from that of optional rule. First of all, exceptional and irregular forms do not pose a serious difficulty of learnability as they are acquired with primary data, although generally later than regular ones.

However, exceptions and irregularities do cause overgeneration in intermediate grammars when learners tend to generalize rules to apply to even those forms that are exceptions to them. Thus, we hear of *foots and *fishes in learners' grammars, on the analogy of book-books, bus-buses, and so on. It is well known that one of the processes of morphological change involves the paradigm uniformity of forms (Kiparsky 1971). Yet children do not acquire exceptional and irregular forms of the language.

The question that is of interest here is, considering the enormity of the deductive gap between the primary linguistic data and the adult intuitions that he has to acquire, why does a child finally go for a complex grammar? It is difficult to find an answer that assumes a solipsistic view of grammar. The only plausible raison d'être for exceptions and optional rule application in the grammar is the cognizance of alterity – other speakers, other forms.

What is the relationship between linguistic generalisations owing their allegiance to 'others' and the truly productive, inductively derived generalisations in the grammar? There is a tradition of basic research in this area to show
that the former are given precedence in the derivation of forms. Panini had enjoined that in the case of the derivational meanings of forms competing with popular usage, the latter should supersede the former (Raja 1990: 111). Kiparsky’s Elsewhere Condition (for example, Kiparsky 1982), based on Paninian grammar, requires that given a less general rule \( x \) and a more general rule \( y \) applying to a form \( a \), \( x \) has precedence over \( y \). It appears then that properties of grammar relating to ‘others’ are ordered before inductively generalised by the individual.

The picture of linguistic reality that emerges from a consideration of the evidence discussed above supports the addition of consensuality to the individual nature of innate human rationality. As against the view of rationality in which others are a mere part of the environment on which depends the maturation of the linguistic faculty, the revised view incorporates the awareness of others in the linguistic faculty.

Accounting for the linguistic appropriation of the awareness of facts relating to others will need spelling out the principled basis of the sub-component dealing with consensual facts. As far as I can see, this issue will require a detailed investigation of the structure of the lexicon, the various pathways involved in speech production and reception connecting it. Evidence from neurolinguistics appears to have a crucial role to play here.

The proposed Consensual(C)-component ultimately questions the basic assumption of UG, namely, that it is an independent innate system in the mind-brain determining the common properties of languages.

There are aspects of linguistic structure however that seem to reflect the worldly reality in ways that clearly cannot be attributed as originating in the mind, but only organised there. The binary hierarchical nature of the prosodic structure of words and higher units, for example, have quite directly to do with the unidimensional nature of time in which units can be distinguished as ‘long’ versus ‘short’, or ‘weak’ versus ‘strong’, or some such dichotomous set, and not with the structure of the mind which is capable of very complex distinctions. The mind simply organises the material in the manner in which it can be used with facility.

A possible internalist (= individualist) response to the proposal for incorporating ‘others’ in the grammar may be to treat it as belonging to Periphery (Chomsky 1981), covering odd facts of a language that a speaker has to learn and that have nothing to do with UG. Thus claims of connectionism for learning irregular forms by associationist networks rather than by rules are dismissed as irrelevant to UG (Cook and Newson 1996: 71). The internalist arguments, however, have to account for such facts as relevant to the organisational principles of UG. A principle such as the Elsewhere Condition is as much a
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part of the natural endowment as say the property of syntactic operations to be structure-dependent (Chomsky 1975). If EC is not assumed to be a part of UG, grammars can treat all less general facts as peripheral. EC ensures their place in the grammar. The presence of a principle such as EC offers strong evidence for UG allocating a space for ‘other’ facts. This recognition provides the basis for further enquiry into the phenomena that have a bearing on the organisational, not merely acquisitional facts.

6. IDEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Are there general implications of the finding regarding the situation of the other-concept in the grammar? In what ways does the revised ontology affect our understanding of grammar? In several ways. First of all, it relieves the notion of grammar from hypostatisation. Its ontological weight can be ignored only at the risk of condemning generative linguistics to a state of solipsism that does not accord with the facts of linguistic explanation and theory-building. Yet, the explanation of the other concept proposed here supports a reductionist rather than a cultural approach.

It is assumed that the awareness of others in grammar is possible because of an in-built consensual component in them. The extent to which the outer world affects the composition of the grammars by interacting with them is however a matter for deeper investigation, possibly within a broader approach along the lines of evolutionary biology (Wilson 1995). A purely cultural account of the knowledge of others in grammars that assumes that knowledge of language is collective and social rather than individual is flawed on familiar grounds (Pateman 1987).

The fundamental problem with TG linguist in accepting the innate social aspect of linguistic reality arises from the fact that the concept of Universal Grammar is grounded in biology. The study of individual grammars consequently assumes them as the linguistic apparatus in the mind/brain. The knowledge of language, however, although grounded in biology exists in consciousness. The other-concept is homogeneous with linguistic knowledge at the level of consciousness. The later view of Universal Grammar as a subject matter of the cognitive science, a field of study inspired mainly by the work of Chomsky, should have no difficulty in coming to terms with the concept. The proposal of the paper is that grammar, as a module of cognition, includes a mental space for ‘others’ that has a bearing on its internal organisation. The main evidence for the other-concept has come from the phenomena of exceptions and optional rule applications, which are a problem for learnability
theory, and all those properties of a grammar that put a check on the creative ability of 'homo loquens'.

In what ways is the other-concept revealing about reality and human nature? It supports the scientific view of reality. Like the world as known to science, grammar too is subject to dual or multiple control (for example, Prigogine and Stengers 1984): on the one hand, the innate principles of UG, and on the other hand, external facts funnelled via the instinct for 'others'. The other-concept rationalises our ability to reach beyond our private selves. At the same time, in so far as individual grammars allow 'others' to bear on them, human individuals have a mutual dependency relation even at the level of consciousness, which is where grammars dwell. This fact accounts for the continuity of knowledge, scope for change in the knowledge, and the spread of change. Diversity is thus innately ingrained in the mental dispensation for knowledge of language.

NOTES

1. A great deal of German and French work on philosophy of language falls in this camp, especially that of Gadamer, Habermas, Derrida and Foucault. Despite its great interest, it has not yet established a working relation with linguistic investigations, and is thus not being discussed here.
2. See Eummet (1993) on how philosophy can do with the notion 'idioloc' even for advocates of the communication-intension approach to the explanation of linguistic knowledge.
4. The No-Coda Constraint in Malayalam (Mohanan 1982) prevents syllables from ending in consonants. This leads Malayalam speakers to break words like bhakti 'devotion' and campa as bha-ki and ca-m-pa, unlike, for example, Hindi speakers who break it as bha-k-ti and ca-m-pa.
5. According to the Sonority Sequencing Principle (Kiparsky 1979), segments of a syllable progressively decrease in sonority from peak to the margin, for example, in punk, the vowel is the most sonorous segment occupying the peak position; the flanking segments gradually decrease in sonority towards the margin.
6. Some linguists (for example, Di Sciullo and Williams 1987) may find these aspects of linguistic knowledge of little interest, while others (Halle 1973) may find them to be significant. In the later approach, all idiosyncratic words are assigned to the dictionary or the 'conventional lexicon' (Corbin 1989), while non-words are kept out by a 'filter' or 'selector', interposed between the rest of the grammar and the lexicon.
7. See Griffin (1977) for a discussion of these terms.
9. A generative linguistic account of language variation and change must be based on knowing how the macro-level reality of language relates to the micro-level reality of grammar. Positioning the other concept in the grammar appears to be the only plausible way to do this.

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